

Document F: Joellen Drag-Oslund

Naval Service: In the spring of 1973, Joellen Drag was one of the first women officers selected for flight training in the Navy. After completing the rigorous flight training program, she became one of two women helicopter pilots. Existing legislation (Title 10 U.S.C. Section 6015) barred women from shipboard commands or billets (jobs). When Drag first reported to her helicopter squadron in 1974, Title 10 Section 6015 deprived her of significant flying time. Drag was not allowed to hover over the flight deck of a seagoing ship, let alone land. Her husband recalled, “The law did not just hurt Joellen’s career—it also prevented our Navy from utilizing a skilled pilot.” Furthermore, her prospects for promotion were hindered because, as a female, she was not able to deploy with her squadron. In March of 1976, Drag penned a 5-page letter to the Secretary of the Navy requesting permission to exempt her from Section 6015. In the letter she wrote: “I am making this request so my development and career as a naval officer might keep pace with that of my [male] contemporaries in this squadron.” Drag’s request was signed by the Commander in Chief of U.S. Pacific Fleet and forwarded up the chain of command for consideration. Ultimately the request to serve beside her squadron on deployment was denied. Drag’s career was stalling out.

Failing to get the permission she needed to do her job from Navy higher ups, Drag searched for other ways to advance her career. In 1977 Joellen Drag was asked if she would join a class action lawsuit against the Navy. *Owens v. Brown* was slated to be heard by the District Court in Washington, D.C.. Recognizing that her career could never advance unless Section 6015 of Title 10 was overturned, Drag added her voice to the court case. In July 1978, Judge John Sirica ruled in favor of Drag and her female counterparts in the case *Owens v. Brown*. Soon after, Congress drafted new legislation, and in the fall of 1978, women were finally allowed to be assigned to shipboard billets. Joellen Drag-Oslund went on to have a successful career with the Navy. She eventually retired as a Captain.

